



SAFETY ALERT 05-00

17th Coast Guard District
United States Coast Guard
P. O. Box 25517
Juneau, Alaska 99802
www.uscg.mil/d17/FVSWEB/d17fvs.htm

CALL FOR A FREE DOCKSIDE EXAM

MSO Anchorage	271-6725	MSD Sitka	966-5454
MSO Valdez	835-7223	MSD Ketchikan	225-4496
MSO Juneau	463-2448	MSD Kodiak	486-5918
MSD Dutch Harbor	581-3466	MSD Kenai	283-3292

FISHING VESSEL SINKS, 5 CREW SAVED, OFF UYAK BAY, KODIAK, ALASKA

Background: The Seventeenth Coast Guard District Safety Alert program provides timely safety-related information of “Lessons Learned” from marine casualties in support of the Coast Guard’s “Ready for Sea” safety program.

Incident: A 96-foot crab boat (converted gulf shrimper) was returning from the Opilio fishing grounds when it took on water and sank in the vicinity of Rocky Point off Uyak Bay, Kodiak Island around 6 AM on the morning of April 20th. The crew was alerted to the flooding earlier that morning by the high water level bilge alarm, which made two strange sounding alarms. The crew discovered 2-3 feet of water in the engine room, engaged the bilge pump and attempted to slow the water flow into the vessel. Vessel was experiencing heavy seas and 30-40 knot winds when the incident occurred. The captain was maintaining his position, with the vessel’s main tank “tanked down,” waiting for the winds to subside. Seawater was permitted to continuously flow to an overboard discharge to keep the circulating pump from freezing up. The captain observed the aft one-third of the vessel awash, and a crewmember went to the engine room to check the pump and suction valve alignments. He found a foot of water already in the compartment, and the water level was rising. The vessel’s bilge alarms had failed to sound. Another crewmember located the immersion suits and readied the life raft. The source of flooding could not be located and the vessel was rapidly losing stability. The crew donned their immersion suits and launched the life raft. The captain was able to notify the Coast Guard on VHF-FM radio of their situation just before the vessel capsized. As the vessel capsized, the crew jumped in the water and climbed into the life raft. The captain did not have enough time to properly don his immersion suit prior to entering the water and his suit leaked until his son assisted him. The EPIRB floated free and began transmitting the vessel’s information and position when the vessel capsized and sank. Within 45 minutes, a Coast Guard helicopter hoisted the crew and airlifted them to Kodiak. After the rescue, the captain was treated for hypothermia.

Lessons Learned: There are “Ready for Sea” safety factors that are relevant to this incident and several lessons learned.

1. Crew training in emergency situations is critical. Conducting drills at the dock and while underway prepare crewmembers for emergency situations.
2. Properly functioning bilge alarms and pumps provide an early warning and time to conduct damage control and prevent the vessel’s sinking. Routinely test alarms and pumps.
3. If “tanking down” to ensure stability, regularly inspect valves and strainers for proper service and conduct routine, periodic inspections of compartments.
4. Communications were timely and clear. In this case, the properly installed and armed EPIRB provided critical backup to mark the location of the survivors.
5. Properly fitting and serviced immersion suits save lives. Seawater in immersion suits greatly reduces the survival rate and a person’s ability to maneuver. Practice donning immersion suits.
6. Knowledge of how life rafts operate is the key to ensuring they deploy properly. The crew had recently witnessed the servicing of the life raft and was familiar with its operation.
7. The vessel’s most recent CG exam was June 18, 1998. These free exams, performed at the dock, help identify safety deficiencies that can lead to the loss of a vessel and/or its crew.